

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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NEW RULES ALLOW EMERGENCY CLOSURE OF MIGRATORY BIRD HUNTING SEASONS

A migratory bird hunting season can now be closed on a temporary emergency basis if the hunting poses a threat to an endangered or threatened species, Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director of Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today.

The new rules, published November 13 in the Federal Register, acknowledge that some endangered wildlife do not pay attention to such things as refuge boundaries and hunting seasons and can therefore wander into dangerous situations. So, in order to avoid harm or fatal injury to endangered or threatened species, the Fish and Wildlife Service will close or temporarily suspend, whenever necessary, the migratory bird hunting season in a given area.

These regulations support the intent of the Endangered Species Act of 1973 which requires all Federal agencies to carry out their authorities in a manner consistent with the conservation of endangered or threatened species.

The Fish and Wildlife Service with full cooperation of the State has already closed the hunting seasons for Canada geese in three counties in California because the Aleutian Canada geese, an endangered subspecies,

(over)

were known to rest there during their migration south. These closures were specifically proposed when the 1975 migratory bird hunting regulations were developed last summer during public hearings.

Two recent events, one caused by weather, the other by the Fish and Wildlife Service, emphasized the need for quicker action. Whooping cranes migrating from Canada to Texas usually stop over in North Dakota where sandhill cranes are hunted. The whoopers normally depart long before the hunting season begins, but unexpectedly warm weather this year so delayed the whoopers' migration that they were present in North Dakota on the opening day of the sandhill crane season, November 8, although not in the eight counties open for sandhill crane hunting.

An experimental project in which sandhill cranes hatched whooping crane eggs and raised the chicks as their own was initiated this year by the Service. The whooper juveniles have migrated with their foster parents from Idaho to the Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico. Bosque del Apache traditionally conducts a snow goose hunting season and it was thought that it might threaten the six whooper juveniles despite the fact that they are under almost constant surveillance. Refuge personnel devised plans to sound a siren whenever the whoopers approached a hunting area. The siren would indicate to hunters--who had been notified upon entering the refuge--that all hunting was temporarily stopped.

The Fish and Wildlife Service published this regulation as a final rulemaking because of the potential need to exercise the authority in the immediate future. The Service found it impractical and contrary to the public interest to issue this amendment as a proposed rulemaking subject to comment.

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